



General Assembly

Distr.: General
16 February 2016

English only

Human Rights Council
Thirty-first session
Agenda item 5
Human rights bodies and mechanisms

**Written statement* submitted by Reporters Sans Frontiers
International — Reporters Without Borders International, a
non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[01 February 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).



CONCRETE PROPOSAL TO IMPROVE JOURNALISTS' SAFETY

Various UN bodies have adopted resolutions in the past decade – including Security Council Resolutions 2222 adopted in 2015 and 1738 in 2006, and General Assembly Resolutions 68/163, 69/185, 70/162 - with the aim of protecting journalists and combating impunity for those responsible for violence against journalists.

The Human Rights Council itself has been dealing with the issue for the past few years, held panels and adopted several resolutions among which HRC/RES/21/12 which states specifically in Article 11 that it

Stresses the need to ensure better cooperation and coordination at the international level with regard to ensuring the safety of journalists, including with regional organizations, and invites United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, other international and regional organizations, Member States and all relevant stakeholders, when applicable and in the scope of their mandates, to cooperate further in the implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, elaborated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and endorsed by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination;

The following year, in June 2014, during a UN Human Rights Council panel on the safety of journalists mandated by the same resolution, Getachew Engida, UNESCO's deputy director, Dunja Mijatovic, the OSCE's representative for media freedom, and Frank La Rue, the then UN Human Rights Council special rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, all agreed that governments had failed to respect their obligations.

The following year, in August 2015, the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in his annual report on the safety of journalists, on the issue of impunity, doesn't hesitate to also speak of failure: *"I am deeply concerned about the failure to reduce the frequency and scale of targeted violence that journalists face and the near absolute impunity for such crimes,"* adding *"the international legal framework for the protection of journalists and media workers is in place,"* but *"the major challenge remains to ensure compliance with this framework."*

Numbers speak

If we are to judge by the number of journalists killed each year, neither the urgency of the situation nor the progress made at the legal level have been reflected in the reality on the ground.

According to *Reporters Without Borders*, 787 journalists and media personnel have been killed in the exercise of their profession over the last 10 years. In the year 2015 alone, there were, world-wide, 67 deaths of newsproviders while doing their job. In conflict zones, such as Syria where 55 professional journalists were killed since the beginning of the civil war in 2011, journalists were deliberately targeted, murdered, and executed in public.

In areas not afflicted by armed conflict, in situations considered peaceful, journalists also face increasing violence. In 2015, two thirds of the journalists killed were tallied in situations that were not defined as "armed conflict". Peaceful assembly, demonstrations in the course of social conflicts are notoriously dangerous for journalists who are generally among the first targets of the police or even sometimes protesters.

While digital technology offers effective new ways to spread propaganda with impunity, journalists lack a safe and enabling environment to provide the information needed to not only combat organized crime and violent extremism, but to also help in their prevention.

Without truly effective protection of newsproviders, the people's right to know and the right to impart information enshrined in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights cannot be guaranteed

Reporters Without Borders urges the Human Rights Council to join all other relevant stakeholders in recommending that the Secretary General appoint a Special Representative for the safety of journalists (SRSJ).

Precedent

Such a mechanism already exists on the issue of Children in Armed conflicts and has proven its efficacy.

The *Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Children in Armed Conflicts* was established in 1997 with the mandate to report to the then Commission on Human Rights and the UN General Assembly - and since 1999 to the Security Council. UNICEF, UNHCR and OHCHR were asked to support the new mandate.

Since 1997, the Special Representative has promoted world-wide awareness on the gravity of the situation of children in armed conflicts and made possible the implementation of concrete actions such as the adoption of a series of UNSC resolutions on themes specific to this issue, and the formulation of a protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UNGA in 2000 which today has been ratified today by 156 States. Furthermore, the Special Representative has been able to actively promote the adoption and effective implementation of national legislations.

What a Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on the Safety of Journalists could do

A *Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on the safety of journalists* (SRSJ) with a central and permanent position under the UN Secretary General (UNSG) aegis would significantly strengthen and give more coherence to all the efforts of the relevant UN agencies, organs and programmes working on this issue, in particular to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Human Rights Council and all its mechanisms, The Human Rights Committee, UNESCO, as well as regional and national bodies.

Following are suggested coordination and monitoring functions which could be included, among others, in such a mandate. These are called for in the *UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity* and contained in HRC/RES/21/12

- **Collecting information** on threats to the safety of media professionals specifically reported within the UN system.
- **Serving as a systematic and rapid alert mechanism** for the most serious violations affecting newsproviders, in both conflicts and non-conflict situations.
- **Liaising with the Security Council (UNSC)** to facilitate a rapid use of all the tools at the UNSC's disposal.
- **Coordinating the monitoring activities of relevant agencies** at international, regional and national levels.
- **Complementing the work of the Human Rights Committee** with a more specific mandate focused on the safety of journalists.
- **Facilitating the development of harmonized strategies** among all international organs, funds and programs.
- **Encouraging the establishment of a coordinated network of regional focal points** on the safety of journalists.

It is essential to ensure that journalists, media associations and other relevant civil society actors, be included in any future discussions dealing with this issue and *Reporters Without Borders* stands ready to collaborate.